



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
**U.S. Department
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov

News Release

Date: September 14, 2016

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Secretary Jewell, State of California Announce Landmark Renewable Energy, Conservation Plan for 10 Million Acres of California Desert

*Comprehensive Blueprint to Guide Responsible Renewable Energy Development,
Conserve Key Landscapes*

Palm Desert, Calif. – As part of President Obama's [Climate Action Plan](#) to create jobs, cut carbon pollution and develop clean domestic energy, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today joined federal, state and local officials to announce approval of Phase I of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), an innovative, landscape-level renewable energy and conservation planning effort covering 10.8 million acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the California desert. Secretary Jewell made the announcement on the second stop of a [three-state renewable energy tour](#) to highlight Obama Administration efforts to support renewable energy development on public lands and waters.

Phase I is part of a larger, comprehensive effort with the State of California designed to provide a blueprint across 22 million acres of public and private land in California's desert region for streamlining renewable energy development while conserving unique and valuable ecosystems and providing outdoor recreation opportunities. The lands specifically identified for renewable energy development by the plan have the potential to generate up to 27,000 megawatts of renewable energy – enough to power over eight million homes – that will help meet federal and state renewable energy and climate change goals.

“Today we celebrate the culmination of more than eight years of thoughtful planning, deep collaboration and extensive public engagement to guide future management of 10 million acres of California desert that belong to all Americans,” said Secretary Jewell. “This landscape-level plan will support streamlined renewable energy development in the right places while protecting sensitive ecosystems, preserving important cultural heritage and supporting outdoor recreation opportunities.”

“Renewable energy is a key part of California's approach to addressing climate change, and large scale renewable energy projects in the California desert will play an essential role in

California meeting climate and renewable energy goals,” said California Energy Commissioner Karen Douglas. “The DRECP provides a clear pathway for projects on public lands, while giving the state much greater certainty about where those projects could be located.”

The Bureau of Land Management’s Land Use Plan Amendment, which represents the conclusion of Phase I of the DRECP, identifies priority areas for renewable energy development while setting aside millions of acres for conservation and outdoor recreation. The plan designates Development Focus Areas with high-quality solar, wind and geothermal energy potential and access to transmission, sited in low conflict areas. Applications in these areas will benefit from a streamlined permitting process, predictable survey requirements, and simplified mitigation measures. Interior is also considering additional financial incentives for projects located in these areas through an ongoing rulemaking process.

The plan also identifies National Conservation Lands and designates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, wildlife allocations and National Scenic and Historic Trail management corridors to conserve biological, cultural and other values. These lands would be closed to renewable energy development and benefit from adaptive management in the face of climate change. Special Recreation Management Areas and Extensive Recreation Management Areas are identified to recognize and promote recreational opportunities and public access. Some portions of Extensive Recreation Management Areas will be available for renewable energy development as appropriate.

“The plan approved today presents an important vision for the southern California desert,” said Neil Kornze, Director of the Bureau of Land Management. “It will both support the permitting of critically important renewable energy projects and help advance state and federal conservation goals.”

“The DRECP represents an excellent example of collaboration among federal, state and local government partners,” said Jerome Perez, Bureau of Land Management California State Director. “I look forward to continuing this collaboration during implementation.”

The BLM plan complements the non-federal land component of the DRECP (Phase II), which is ongoing, led by California Energy Commission. Like Phase I, Phase II includes close coordination among federal, state and local partners. The phased approach provides additional opportunities for agencies to work with counties and other stakeholders to address issues and concerns, and better align local, state and federal policies and goals. Counties with primary land-use and permitting authority on private lands in the planning area include Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego.

The finalization of the DRECP is the result of an eight year process of extensive public participation, which included collaboration among the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and countless other stakeholders. The planning effort began in 2008, as the desert region was experiencing a substantial increase in renewable energy projects. At that time, applications for these projects were reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

The agencies held 11 public meetings and received more than 16,000 comments following the [draft DRECP's release in September 2014](#). In March 2016, the BLM opened a separate public comment period specific to the proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Based on input from stakeholders, the final plan approved today was modified from the proposed plan in order to enhance its ability to deliver on all agencies' renewable energy development and conservation goals. The BLM modified proposed conservation management actions applicable to renewable energy development to provide additional flexibility where appropriate, consistent with the plan's overall management objectives. Similarly, ACEC boundaries were adjusted to ensure lands included within those designations furthered the applicable conservation goals.

This effort is also consistent with President Obama's [Climate Action Plan](#), which outlines an array of actions to reduce carbon pollution, increase energy efficiency, expand renewable and other low-carbon energy sources, and strengthen resilience to extreme weather and other climate impacts. As part of that plan, the President directed the Interior Department to approve at least 20,000 megawatts of renewable energy capacity on the public lands by 2020. The DRECP will help the Department meet that goal, in addition to supporting the State's effort to achieve 50 percent renewable energy generation by 2030.

Since 2009, Interior has approved 59 utility-scale renewable energy projects on public lands, including 35 solar, 11 wind and 13 geothermal projects and associated transmission infrastructure that could support nearly 15,500 megawatts of renewable energy capacity, or enough to power approximately 5.1 million homes.

In addition, Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management offshore energy development program has awarded 11 commercial wind energy leases in federal waters off the Atlantic coast. These sales encompass more than one million acres in federal waters that, if fully developed, have the potential to power over four million homes.

An informational webinar will be held on Sept. 15, from 10:00-11:30 a.m. PST to present an overview of the plan and next steps for implementation. Webinar details are available at www.drecp.org and www.blm.gov/ca/drecp.

The federal plan for these 10.8 million acres of public lands is detailed in the Bureau of Land Management's Record of Decision and Land Use Plan Amendment. To view these documents as well as additional DRECP information, visit www.drecp.org or www.blm.gov/ca/drecp.

Photos are available on [BLM California Flickr](#).

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